

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----070404 030922Z /11

O 030812Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9047
INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 4435

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LE
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH AMINE GEMAYEL

1. KINSOLVING AND I HAD TWO HOUR CONVERSATION WITH AMINE GEMAYEL, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND PHALANGE POLITICIAN, AUGUST 2. FOLLOWING IS GIST OF RATHER COMPLICATED EXCHANGE.

2. AMINE SAID THAT HE HAD DONE THE IMPOSSIBLE TO RESTRAIN PHALANGE FROM PROVOKING SYRIANS IN HIS AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY, WHICH IS THE METN. THIS AREA INCLUDES BEIRUT SUBURBS OF SIN AL-FIL AND JDAIDE. HE NOTED THAT IN OTHER SECTORS RESTRAINT HAD NOT BEEN EXERCISED AND PHALANGE HAD PROVOKED SYRIANS. HE ASCRIBED THIS IN PART TO INTEMPERATE ATTITUDE OF CERTAIN PEOPLE (MEANING BASHIR) AND TO GUIDANCE THEY ARE GETTING FROM ISRAELIS. INDEED, HE HAD RECEIVED INFORMATION IN PAST 48 HOURS INDICATING THAT ISRAELIS

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HAD RECEIVED NEW GUIDANCE FROM US AND WERE PLANNING SOME FORM OF INTERVENTION IN LEBANON IN COMING FEW DAYS. AUGUST 10 WAS SUPPOSED TO BE MAGIC DATE.

3. I SAID WE HAD BEEN IN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION WITH ISRAELIS ASKING THEM TO URGE RESTRAINT ON THEIR LEBANESE FRIENDS. THEY HAD ASSURED US AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL THAT

MESSAGES OF RESTRAINT HAD BEEN SENT AND WE THOUGHT THE PHALANGE AND OTHER GROUPS IN LEBANON SHOULD BE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT ISRAELIS WERE PLANNING INTERVENTION HERE. MILITARY ASPECTS OF INTERVENTION WERE MOST UNATTRACTIVE TO ISRAELIS. HAD MESSAGES OF RESTRAINT NOT ARRIVED?

4. AMINE SAID MESSAGES HAD ARRIVED BUT THEY WERE COUCHED IN TERMS OF THE SITUATION NOT YET BEING RIPE FOR INTERVENTION. IMPLICATION WAS THAT INTERVENTION WAS COMING SOONER OR LATER. FURTHERMORE, CERTAIN PEOPLE WHO REPRESENTED THEMSELVES AS BEING IN TOUCH WITH ISRAELIS HAD PASSED THE WORD AROUND THAT ISRAELIS WANTED SITUATION HERE TO BE KEPT TENSE AND WANTED CHRISTIANS TO CONTINUE PROVOKING SYRIANS. HE PERSONALLY WAS CONVINCED THAT ISRAELIS HAD IN MIND DOING SOMETHING BECAUSE ISRAELI TELEVISION HAD PUBLISHED REPORT HIS BROTHER BASHIR HAD VISITED ISRAEL. THIS WAS DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO BURN BASHIR AND SIGNIFY ISRAELIS HAD SOMETHING AFOOT.

5. I SAID THERE WERE UNDOUBTEDLY SOME ISRAELIS WHO FELT IT WAS IN ISRAEL'S INTEREST FOR SYRIANS TO REMAIN HERE BECAUSE THIS WAS SYRIA'S VIETNAM. THERE SEEMED TO BE VARIOUS CURRENTS OF ISRAELI POLICY JUST AS THERE WERE VARIOUS CURRENTS OF SYRIAN POLICY AND IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT THE PEOPLE DIRECTING ONE OF THESE CURRENTS WOULD LIKE TO KEEP SITUATION HERE HOT SO THAT SYRIANS WOULD REMAIN BOGGED
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DOWN. IF THAT WAS THE CASE, CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT LEND THEMSELVES TO THIS TACTIC. AMINE SAID HE HIMSELF WAS CONVINCED THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE TRYING TO USE THE CHRISTIANS AS THE OIL WITH WHICH TO BURN THE SYRIANS. HE HAD ARGUED THIS POINT AT SOME LENGTH WITHIN THE PHALANGE BUT THERE WERE OTHERS WHO CLAIMED THAT THE U.S. WAS SUPPORTING ISRAELI POLICY IN THIS RESPECT AND THE PHALANGE, OF COURSE, WOULD NOT WANT TO GO AGAINST OUR POLICY. I SAID OUR POLICY WAS THAT IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT EVERYONE EXERCISE RESTRAINT.

6. WE DISCUSSED AT SOME LENGTH POSSIBILITY OF DISENGAGEMENT IN BEIRUT. I SAID IT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT SARKIS WAS SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN ARRANGING ONE BUT THAT ESSENTIAL PRE-CONDITION WAS PERIOD OF CALM. CHRISTIAN MILITANTS SHOULD REALIZE THEY HAD THREE CHOICES. ONE WAS AN ACCOMMODATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT SYRIANS TO WITHDRAW GRACEFULLY. SECOND WAS TO BECOME SYRIAN COLONY. THIRD WAS CIVIL WAR. SYRIANS WERE NOT GOING TO TAKE A DEFEAT IN BEIRUT. IF THEY HAD TO WITHDRAW UNWILLINGLY, THEY WOULD DO EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO PROVOKE FURTHER TROUBLE IN LEBANON AND THERE WOULD BE WAR. IT WAS IN CHRISTIAN INTEREST TO AVOID THIS AND COME TO UNDERSTANDING WITH SYRIANS.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 4435

EXDIS

7. I SAID I HAD HEARD REPORTS OF DISCREET CONTACTS WITH PALESTINIANS WITH VIEW TO ARRANGING MODUS VIVENDI WHICH WOULD FACILITATE SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL. COULD HE SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THIS? AMINE SAID SUCH CONTACTS HAD BEEN UNDERWAY BUT THERE WERE NO RESULTS AS YET. HIS FATHER, SHIEKH PIERRE, WAS QUITE PREPARED TO ENTER INTO DISCUSSIONS OF THIS SORT, BUT ANY CHRISTIAN LEADER WHO ENTERED INTO AGREEMENT WITH PALESTINIANS WHICH WOULD LEGITIMIZE LATTER'S PRESENCE IN LEBANON WOULD BE SUBJECT TO TERRIBLE BARRAGE OF CRITICISM. I SAID HE WAS GOING CONSIDERABLY FURTHER THAN I HAD THOUGHT WAS INTENDED. TO ME, MOST THAT COULD BE HOPED FOR AT THIS POINT WAS SIMPLE MODUS VIVENDI IN WHICH BOTH SIDES WOULD UNDERTAKE NOT TO ATTACK THE OTHER FOR THE TIME BEING.

8. AMINE ASKED NUMBER OF QUESTIONS ABOUT SITUATION IN SOUTH AND LEBANESE COLUMN WHICH WAS STOPPED AT KAWKABA. I SAID LEBANESE HAD CONDUCTED THIS OPERATION LIKE THEY
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DROVE THEIR CARS, DARTING OUT INTO THE STREET WITHOUT LOOKING EITHER TO THE RIGHT OR LEFT. WE HAD ENCOURAGED THEM TO GO SOUTH AND WE THOUGHT IT WAS RIGHT THEY HAD DONE SO. THEY HAD COME UPON AN UNEXPECTED OBSTACLE, BUT THAT WAS NO REASON TO LOSE HEART. THEY KNEW THEY WERE TAKING RISKS, AND WHEN ONE TAKES A RISK, ONE SHOULD HAVE ALTERNATIVES IN MIND TO USE IF THE STRATEGY DID NOT WORK. I THOUGHT SOMETHING COULD BE WORKED OUT IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS AND WE WERE DOING OUR BEST IN THAT RESPECT.

9. AMINE PREFACED HIS REMARKS BY SAYING THAT PHALANGE DECIDED TO CREATE AN EMERGENCY COMMISSION OF WHICH HE WAS TO BE THE CHAIRMAN AND WHICH WOULD HAVE SUTHORITY OVER ALL ACTIVITIES OF THE PARTY. HE HAD BEEN BOYCOTTING PARTY ACTIVITIES BECAUSE OF THE EHDEN MASSACRE, OF WHICH HE DISAPPROVED DEEPLY. THE FIRST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE WAS TO BE HELD AUGUST 3RD AND HE WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO INFLUENCE PARTY POLICIES EITHER TO EXACERBATE SITUATION, IF THAT WAS WHAT WE AND THE ISRAELIS WANTED, OR TO CALM IT. I SAID I HOPED HE WOULD CALM IT BECAUSE NEITHER WE NOR ISRAELIS WERE INTERESTED IN EXACERBATING IT. ALGHOUTH HE DID NOT SAY SO, IMPLICATING OF HIS REMARKS IS THAT CONTROL OF MILITARY ACTIVITIES WILL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM BASHIR. I WILL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SEE IT.

10. THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION, AND IN PARTICULAR IN HIS SUMMING UP BEFORE ITS END, GEMAYEL STRESSED THAT HE WOULD WELCOME CONFIDENTIAL EXPOSITIONS OF U.S. POLICIES ON ISSUES SUCH AS CHRISTIAN RELATIONS WITH THE SYRIANS, THE PALESTINIANS, THE ISRAELIS, AND THE LEBANESE MUSLIMS, INCLUDING JUMBLATT. HE INDICATED THAT HE WOULD HOPE TO SEE ME OR ONE OF MY OFFICERS TO DISCUSS THESE MATTERS AGAIN WITHIN THE NEXT TEN DAYS OR SO.

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11. WITH REGARD TO PHALANGIST MILITIAS IN SOUTH, GEMAYEL MADE SOME COMMENTS WHICH ARE PARTICULARLY INTERSTING IN LIGHT OF WARLIKE STATEMENTS OPPOSING LAF MOVEMENT BEING MADE BY FRANCIS RIZK AND LOUIS HASROUNI, SELFSTYLED SPOKESMEN OF PHALANGE IN SOUTH, TO ISRAELI AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA. AMINE SAID PARTY HAD SENT NUMBER OF MEN TO SOUTH AT TIME OF ISRAELI INVASION WITH UNDERSTANDING ISRAELIS WERE COMING ALL THE WAY TO BEIRUT. GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT HAD SET IN SINCE THEN, AND HE HAD RECENTLY RECEIVED DELEGATION FROM MEN AT AIN ABL URGING THAT EVERYTHING POSSIBLE BE DONE TO SEND ARMY TO SOUTH. AMINE SAID HE HAD VOLUNTEERED TO GO TO MARJAYOUN TO NEGOTIATE WITH HADDAD, BUT OFFER WAS NOT TAKEN UP BY SARKIS. HE WAID NEITHER RIZK NOR HASROUNI

HAD ANY AUTHORITY TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF PARTY. HASROUNI IS QUOTED BY LOCAL PRESS THIS MORNING AS SAYING PHALANGE IN SOUTH WERE NOT TAKING ANY ORDERS FROM PARTY IN BEIRUT BECAUSE LATTER WAS UNDER SYRIAN DOMINATION.

12. COMMENT: AMINE BADLY WANTS TO BE A MINISTER AND IS DOING HIS BEST TO PROJECT MODERATE IMAGE. HIS COMMENTS ARE THEREFORE LIKELY TO BE SELF-SERVING. NEVERTHELESS, IF HIS AMBITION IS FORCING HIM INTO MODERATE CHANNEL, AND IF HE IS GOING TO ASSUME WHAT AMOUNTS TO OVERALL DIRECTION OF PARTY, HE COULD BE VERY USEFUL INFLUENCE AT DIFFICULT TIME.
PARKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHRISTIANS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, COMBAT OPERATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT04435
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS,FMACHAK 25X6
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D780317-1230
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197808124/demeuaaf.tel
Line Count: 237
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Message ID: b8d6f759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1589285
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> gwr 20010601; <DBA CHANGED> mcm 20010914
Subject: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH AMINE GEMAYEL
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MOPS, LE, SY, (GEMAYEL, AMINE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/b8d6f759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014